

Copyright  
by  
Jesse Andrew Cline  
2016

**The Report Committee for Jesse Andrew Cline**  
**Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:**

**Resisting Heteronormative Neoliberal Capitalism:  
Motivations of a Queer Designer**

**APPROVED BY**  
**SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

---

Carma Gorman

---

Jiwon Park

---

Curran Nault

**Resisting Heteronormative Neoliberal Capitalism:  
Motivations Of A Queer Designer**

**by**

**Jesse Andrew Cline, BS**

**Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May 2016**

## **Dedication**

I'd like to dedicate this work to the two most powerful women I know, my mother Martha Hinojosa and my sister Analía Treviño.

I'd also like to dedicate this work to the memories and lives of LGBTQ people around the world who may not have the privilege to engage in dialogue about queer ideas.



## Acknowledgements

In reverse chronological order I'd like to thank the Design Division faculty at the University of Texas at Austin—Carma Gorman, Jiwon Park, and Kate Catterall; past faculty Gloria Lee and Colin Frazer; kt shorb; Curran Nault; R. Eric McMaster, who taught me every fabrication method I now know; Kevin Auer, who held my hand while I learned to letterpress print; Ryan Hawk, hbc, who put up with all my stress and helped me whenever he could; Robin McDowell, Brent Dixon, Becky Nasadowski, and José Pérez, Amanjot Kaur Sandhu who graciously passed on their survival skills to a first-year; Audrey Bennett and Sara Tack, who first helped me on the design path; and Terri Foltz-Fox, who encouraged my angsty teen self to be creative and make.

## **Abstract**

### **Resisting Heteronormative Neoliberal Capitalism: Motivations Of A Queer Designer**

Jesse Andrew Cline, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Carma Gorman

Historically, the design profession in the US has been beholden to the capitalist free market; most projects are commissioned by clients, who are in turn motivated by capitalistic goals. In order to gain greater visibility and rights in the public sphere in the US, many LGBTQ+ people have chosen to follow a heteronormative social model, in particular by embracing the institution of gay marriage (rather than by making the more radical move of challenging the utility of the institution of marriage for queers *and* straights). Marketers have pounced on the opportunity to sell products to this new, socially unthreatening homonormative demographic, which, like heteronormative groups, has tended to express citizenship through consumerism.

As a form of what Kalle Lasn calls culture-jamming, I have made a series of subversive artifacts and communication devices that resist hetero- and homonormativity and articulate a radical queer politics of design and anti-consumerist citizenship. My works are informed by radical queer theory and non-normative, queerly-inspired content, methodologies, and aesthetics; the sex toys, in particular, are polemical objects intended

to challenge and disrupt the homonormative consumer culture fostered by the twenty-first century's neoliberal economic environment.

Keywords: visual design, queer, homonormativity, heteronormativity, normativity, culture-jamming, subversion, LGBTQ

## Table of Contents

List of Illustrations .....	ix
Framing + Rationale .....	1
A Polite But Ineffective Strategy for Queer Design Activism: Assimilation .....	3
History Of The Rainbow .....	3
The Pink Dollar .....	7
The (Tame) Pride Parade .....	9
Normative Effects .....	10
Another Polite but Ineffective Strategy for Making Radical Queerness Visible: Utopianism .....	14
The Way Forward: Subversion .....	16
Appropriation and Re-Appropriation .....	16
Culture Jamming .....	18
Alternative Aesthetics (aka “bad design”) .....	18
Camp .....	19
Exhibition: COME + TAKE IT .....	21
Exhibition Artifacts .....	22
COME + TAKE IT Flag .....	22
Functional Wedding Ring .....	26
Production .....	29
Ex-Straight Conversion Therapy .....	30
Rainbowwashing Corner .....	32
Magic Eye Rainbow .....	34
Queer Capsule Surprise .....	35
So, What? .....	36
References .....	37

## List of Illustrations

Illustration 1: Gilbert Baker, original eight-stripe design for the Rainbow Pride Flag .....	5
Illustration 2: Modern, commercialized six-stripe interpretation of the Rainbow Pride Flag. ....	7
Illustration 3: (Left) ACT UP’s iconic re-appropriation of the the Nazi’s pink triangle to call attention to the AIDS crisis (Right) the pink triangle designating homosexual men in concentration camps .....	17
Illustration 4: Video still of John Waters film <i>Female Trouble</i> .....	20
Illustration 5: COME + TAKE IT installation .....	21
Illustration 6: Modern vector Come and Take It graphic .....	22
Illustration 7: Come and Take It appropriated by feminist and pro-gun activists .	23
Illustration 8: COME + TAKE IT flag .....	24
Illustration 9: The author carrying a COME + TAKE IT prototype at Queerbomb! 2015 in Austin, Texas .....	25
Illustration 10: Rubber Functional Wedding Ring .....	26
Illustration 11: Functional Wedding Ring display .....	28
Illustration 12: Detail of signage typography .....	30
Illustration 13: Ex-Straight Conversion Therapy and Magic Eye Rainbow .....	31
Illustration 14: Rainbowashing corner .....	33
Illustration 15: Picked through remains of the capsule surprise—some stickers have been removed .....	35

## Framing + Rationale

As a native-born Texan, of mixed Chicano and Caucasian heritage; as a cis-gendered<sup>1</sup> gay man who is able to pass as white all the time and straight some of the time; as an accent-less Southerner educated in the North—*only steers 'n queers leave Texas, boy*—I returned to my home state where bigotry roams free, and I used my time at the University of Texas at Austin to better understand how sexual and gender minorities in the United States are factored into the whole commercial design equation, and how queer designers function within it.

As a visual and communications designer, it is part of my skill set to be able to code, decode, and recode messages for dissemination. I have always been interested in the creation, interpretation, and consequent autonomous life that symbols take on when released into the outside world (e.g., shibboleths such as pierced ears or bandannas in pockets). If enough people say that an inconsequential shape stands for something, it does.<sup>2</sup> As a young millennial gay growing up in the suburban South, I became hyper-aware of nuanced social coding at an early age. Young queers are hungry for symbols of themselves, and for models of what it looks like to be queer. So often they grow up isolated from others like them, that they will happily embrace any images and commodities that allow them to express their identity and feel a sense of solidarity with others like them.

Having never lived in an urban area on the East or West coast, my exposure to queer visual culture was—and even in Austin continues to be—somewhat limited. In entering a research-based graduate program, I saw a perfect opportunity to reconcile (synthesize) my personal and fairly private identity as a gay man with my professional identity as a communication designer.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cis-gendered is a term used to describe persons whose gender identity and expression align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

<sup>2</sup> The implication here is that communication designers are cultural producers of meaning.

In my MFA thesis work, I decided to propose new and more satisfactorily subversive and radical ways of making “queerness” visible, since the rainbow flag—long the rallying symbol of LGBTQ+ people—was never sufficiently radical in its mass-produced version, and is now so hackneyed, and has been so thoroughly co-opted by marketers, that it is now a symbol of homonormativity<sup>3</sup> rather than of radical queerness. I propose a series of new ways of making radical queerness visible: using zeroes instead of ohs; depicting butt plugs instead of rainbows or even dildos; glitch techniques; using asymmetry as a deliberate form of resistance to capitalist mass manufacturing techniques; and open-source distribution as a counter to rainbow-washing and homonormative consumerism.

As a graduate student in an otherwise client-oriented profession, I had seemingly limitless agency to design and to pursue my own radical queer agenda. The academic institution is regarded as a bastion of progressive thought—but the reality is that UT Austin is located in the capital of a very large, very red state. A few blocks away from the building where I pursued queer ideas, Republican politicians are actively denouncing my LGBTQ+ kinfolk. My designed objects are intended to provoke discourse in an otherwise conservative context, and also to suggest new ways of making LGBTQ+ identities visible that cannot so easily be co-opted by mainstream advertisers.

---

<sup>3</sup> In regards to homonormativity: “This ideology demands the acceptance and internalization of heteronormative ideals to create families within the gay and lesbian community and represents what is called homonormativity, or the assimilation of heteronormative structures, such as the nuclear family, into relationships of lesbians and gay men.” Lisa Duggan. *The Twilight of Equality?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003)

## **A Polite But Ineffective Strategy for Queer Design Activism: Assimilation**

Assimilation is not an effective strategy for what? for making radical queer politics visible, as the history of the rainbow flag clearly demonstrates. While most writing on assimilation refers to immigrants in a new country, in the contemporary US the term also applies to the cultural and political assimilation of LGBTQ+ communities into the greater mainstream society. With legal gains and media representation for some, LGBTQ+ people have faced mounting pressure to assimilate into mainstream society.<sup>4</sup> That early LGBTQ+ activists altered the original design of the rainbow flag in the ways they did was an assimilationist tactic, as was the choice of a rainbow in the first place, because it is imagery that is entirely unthreatening to the heteronormative<sup>5</sup> mainstream culture. Imagery that is easily assimilable by others (such as the rainbow) is, itself, assimilationist.

### **History Of The Rainbow**

Flags are statements of affiliation. They have been used to represent political and national organizations, and those who create or identify with a flag, much like those who create or identify with a coat of arms or a company logo, do so in order to proclaim their legitimacy and agency as political actors. Every country in the world has a flag, all states have a flag; they are ubiquitous signifiers of the identity and agency of a collective.

Many groups have at various times adopted the rainbow flag as a political symbol—including religious groups, mainstream political parties, and radical political actors—yet its contemporary association with the LGBTQ+ rights movement has overshadowed all other meanings. Particularly satisfying to many in the LGBTQ+ community was the wrenching of the rainbow (if not the rainbow flag per se) from the clutches of the hegemonic conservative Right—

---

<sup>4</sup> “LGBTQ rights groups have been dominated by white, middle-class leadership and membership, and have also relied heavily on financial support of affluent, white gays. As a result, their agendas tend to favor assimilation . . . over challenges to the systemic violence and oppression it produces.” Mogul et al. *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> Heteronormativity is an ideology used to promote the normality of the traditional heterosexual marriage in the larger US culture through law, policy and enactment. Lisa Duggan. *The Twilight of Equality?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003)



for whom it was a symbol of the Covenant between God and Man (in which God promised not to partake in genocide again like that whole flood thing)—divesting it of its racist, sexist, and heteronormative connotations. However, it is not clear that San Francisco activists of the late 1970s had subverting the religious right in mind when they decided to use the rainbow as a symbol for gay and lesbian liberation. More likely, they stole the rainbow from the sky, imbuing a universal, natural phenomenon with queer political intent. The use of a beautiful natural phenomenon as a symbol of a minority persecuted at the time for their purported “crimes against nature” was an elegant, if subtle, rejection of homophobia.

In 1978 activists in San Francisco felt they needed a flag to unify their constituents, and the Gay Freedom Day organizers commissioned Gilbert Baker to create his rainbow design. He cited a need to step away from the negative associations of the Nazi pink triangle, and decided on a rainbow because of its ubiquity and its ability to symbolize diversity. (This is important historically, given the fact that approximately a decade later, Gran Fury re-appropriated the pink triangle to bring aggressive visibility to queer people at the height of the AIDS crises.) However, significantly, Baker’s original flag design was *not* the same as the ubiquitous six-color flag used in “rainbow-washing” advertisements today.



Illustration 1: Gilbert Baker, original eight-stripe design for the Rainbow Pride Flag<sup>6</sup>

The original iteration of the rainbow flag was comprised of eight colors: hot pink, red, orange, yellow, green, turquoise, blue, and violet. Baker assigned each color a symbolic meaning: hot pink for sexuality, red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, turquoise for magic/art, blue for serenity, and violet for spirit. As an unintended consequence of industry and operational constraints—namely, pink and turquoise were not widely used colors for flags, so those colors were unavailable from standard flag fabric suppliers—the flag’s colors were reduced in number to match with widely available flag fabrics and to correlate with mass conceptions about what the “colors of the rainbow” were (namely, the three primary and three secondary colors that made up the standard oil-painting color wheel).

An unfortunate effect of the decision to reduce the number of colors from eight to six is that, by ironic happenstance or intention, the two colors removed from the flag, hot pink and turquoise, symbolized sexuality and magic. Hand-made replicas of the original eight-stripe

---

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow\\_flag\\_\(LGBT\\_movement\)/#/media/File:Gay\\_flag\\_8.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow_flag_(LGBT_movement)/#/media/File:Gay_flag_8.svg)

version are available to purchase on Gilbert Baker's site for \$3500, but the six-stripe flag (available for a fraction of the cost on a T-shirt at Target) has taken on a life of its own, and is now widely accepted as the "real" flag. In 2015 the Museum of Modern Art accepted the rainbow pride flag into their design collection; it was, of course, the six-stripe version.<sup>7</sup>

Like the rainbow flag itself, the lives and images of LGBTQ+ people have been neutered of their sexuality and magic as a result of their assimilation within mainstream culture. I think this shows one of the inevitable perils of the mainstream—that ultimately the ideas and images that subcultural groups posit are distorted and altered by those controlling the flow (whether of flag fabrics or of media). Worse, inoffensive symbols such as the rainbow flag—if they are successfully adopted as symbols of a marginal group—are inevitably doomed to be overlain, distorted, and drained of their radical connotations by widespread mainstream usage. In other words, because they are inoffensive and thus assimilationist in character, they are in turn easily assimilated by the very forces they seek to protest.

As visibility for certain sexual minorities grew, the rainbow flag expanded in use, becoming a geographic signifier of queer, and later safe and allied spaces. As pride parades became less political and more a celebration of corporate production and consumption, the rainbow's already ambiguous symbolism (as a marker for a diverse demographic whose only real affiliations with one another were defined by not being heterosexual and not being cisgender), became further degraded with each corporate application. While I will admit that the proliferation of rainbow symbolism within corporate advertising is an indication of the social progress American society has achieved in regards to LGBTQ+ rights, it seems half-hearted when political and economic policy has reflected only parts of this progress in the name of a stimulated economy. What does it mean when corporations who may or may not be participating in morally 'right' business practices, or support harmful political and economic policy, use "rainbow-washing" to suggest that they are socially liberal, but in reality discriminate against

---

<sup>7</sup> "MOMA Acquires the Rainbow Flag" *Inside/Out*. Museum of Modern Art.  
[http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2015/06/17/moma-acquires-the-rainbow-flag/](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2015/06/17/moma-acquires-the-rainbow-flag/)

workers, violate workers' rights, evade taxes, and engage in other activities that are in no way in keeping with the ideals of the rainbow flag?



Illustration 2: Modern, commercialized six-stripe interpretation of the Rainbow Pride Flag.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Pink Dollar**

Despite the fraught, corporately co-opted nature of the rainbow flag, many LGBTQ+ consumers are performing their identities by purchasing commodities marked with (or sold via advertisements featuring) the rainbow flag. As gays and lesbians became more visible after years of activism, the advertising industry began using terms like *The Dream Market* and *The Pink Dollar* to describe marketing opportunities in the LGBTQ+ community. Stakeholders' wallets went aflutter at the prospect of an untapped market, comprised of supposedly affluent, taste-conscious consumers with disposable incomes unburdened by children. Starting in the 90s,

---

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow\\_flag\\_\(LGBT\\_movement\)#/media/File:Gay\\_flag.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow_flag_(LGBT_movement)#/media/File:Gay_flag.svg)

corporations began targeting the newly visible gay and lesbian niche market as a potential source of revenue. As businesses had to move away from the modern, mass-marketing approach in response to the development of identity politics and cultural studies, appealing to the pink dollar was described as non-political: just a smart business strategy.<sup>9</sup>

The tricky part was to create targeted messaging for queers without upsetting their much larger, much more important heterosexual market base. Advertisers do this in three main ways: by being sneaky, and using subtle imagery that can be interpreted queerly by a queer audience but is too ambiguous to reach a heterosexual audience; by using bold and overt symbols or imagery (such as the rainbow flag, or two men kissing); and/or by representing LGBTQ+ people as white, affluent, and gender-normative couples who are as heteronormative-looking and non-sexualized as possible while still being marked through text or imagery as LGBTQ+ (perhaps by holding a rainbow flag).<sup>10</sup>

The omission of human representation and the clichéd use of rainbows (the second option, above) proved the safest way to appeal to the pink dollar, while avoiding criticism from either the extreme right or the extreme left. Businesses started to use the rainbow flag to sell their old products to gays; they also started to make new products with rainbows to sell to gays. Their advertisements and other messages may reach out to a queer demographic, but ultimately they extend their hand primarily to grasp at LGBTQ+ people's wallets. The rainbow flag's frequent use in advertising has diluted its political meanings; rainbow flags used to be waved in marches and hung outside of buildings, as declarations and protective wards by a group of people who were politically disenfranchised. That rallying symbol is now more often adorning products than calling for social justice.

---

<sup>9</sup> "This power can mean increased revenue for the business you own or work for. It can solidify a shrinking sales database in a company's direct marketing efforts. It can prop up a brand's sagging performance in highly competitive geographic areas. It can even bring credibility to a corporate image in need of one or make a company more attractive for prospective employees, partners and associates, lucrative government contracts—even mergers" Grant Lukenbill. *Untold Millions: Secret Truths About Marketing to Gay and Lesbian Consumers*. (Binghamton: The Haworth Press, 1999)

<sup>10</sup> Suzanna Danuta Walters. *Consuming Queers: Advertising and the Gay Market*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

Even when used in “non-political” instances (such as advertising), the rainbow is used un-critically. Pride, Diversity, or Equality are all vague ideologies that fade quickly without clarification or a call to action. In our mediated age, advertising space has gone from multiple minutes to mere seconds. Advertisements can’t be too complex, or else ambiguity disrupts the ads’ call to action. Therefore advertisements rely on tropes, stereotypes, and common semiotic symbols; they are static yet ephemeral, meant to be ingested and understood quickly. The repetitive use of stereotypes and symbols re-asserts established structures of power. This oversimplification is inherently suspect, as there will always be an erasure of some sort.<sup>11</sup> While there has been an increase in representation of actual LGBTQ+ people recently in media and advertising, marketers nonetheless fear disturbing the main market base, the primarily heterosexual, white upper-middle class market. The use of the rainbow is a way to pander to supposedly affluent gays, while avoiding giving offense to their larger heterosexual audience by using reality-based queer representation. The rainbow flag is also used to construct abstract ideals regarding pride and love and equality—without looking at how American neoliberal political and economic systems contradict or invalidate these ideals.

### **The (Tame) Pride Parade**

Perhaps the most visible example of corporate pandering to the pink dollar is during June, the month of the Stonewall Uprising, when Pride parades, events, and parties happen all over the world. The original pride parade was a march in remembrance and solidarity with the demonstrators who clashed with police during the Stonewall Uprising, called the Christopher Street Liberation Day, in New York in 1969. Other activist organizations mobilized similar marches and demonstrations, calling them Gay Liberation Day and Gay Freedom Day marches. In response to public backlash to queers by the Moral Majority in the late 80s, the liberation-oriented rhetoric of the 1960s and 70s gave way to more conservative, assimilationist views

---

<sup>11</sup> Sheila Levrant de Brettville discusses this in relation feminist activism; I see her ideas as applicable to combatting the systemic heterosexism and homophobia of society as well.

within LGBTQ+ rights activism, and the more oppositional descriptors were dropped and replaced with the utopic *Gay Pride*.

The modern-day Pride parade is essentially a real-time, slowly scrolling advertisement for corporate sponsors; it is an entirely de-politicized, de-sexualized, neutered spectacle. Many Pride events, including the one in Austin, charge exorbitant fees (even to non-profits) to participate in the marches and/or tabling. Attendees must often pay an entry fee as well. A recent graphic showed that over 50% of the 2015 Chicago Pride Parade was comprised of corporations.<sup>12</sup> Worse, some city's Pride groups, such as Austin Pride and Pride Houston, Inc., have completely moved the parade out of the LGBT pride month of June in order to avoid the hot Texas summer months (greater attendance means greater profits). These actions have chilling implications: as LGBTQ+ organizers have ceded more control to the corporations that are 'sponsoring' these events, the events have become more about brands than about activism. Pride Month in the U.S. has become more of a queer-themed celebration of consumption than one of sexuality and gender identity.<sup>13</sup> Our pride is literally being sold to us.

### **Normative Effects**

Mainstream gay rights organizations have focused on some pretty conservative political gains in recent years, including the push for gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military, and the campaign to legalize same-sex marriage. The new homonormativity involves patriotic martyrdom and the economic and sexual stability of the monogamous married couple—a neat fit into the existing hegemonic order. Assimilation is less about providing benefits to marginalized groups than it is about maintaining the status quo. Intentional assimilation—as has been practiced by the LGBTQ+ activist community in its efforts to legalize gay marriage—is acceptance without critique. It ignores the oppressive social hierarchies that are pervasive in our peculiar Western society, including monogamy. The capitalist system of 'spousal benefits'

---

<sup>12</sup> Evidence Of The Corporatization Of Pride Parade, In One Pie Chart.  
[http://chicagoist.com/2015/07/06/evidence\\_of\\_the\\_corporatization\\_of.php](http://chicagoist.com/2015/07/06/evidence_of_the_corporatization_of.php)

suggests that those who are not employed, or not related by blood or marriage to an employed person, are not deserving of healthcare insurance, retirement benefits, or tax breaks. A quick search online will point to all sorts of marriage advice that reminds couples of essential differences between people, and how that difference will create challenges, but typically advises people in monogamous relationships to just *slog through it*, implying that maintaining your lifelong ‘commitment’—staying in a toxic marriage—is far more desirable (and moral) than getting a divorce.<sup>14</sup> Cultural assimilation in media reinforces the monogamous couple and the nuclear family (or its close queer analogue) as the ideal, and the only relationship worthy of recognition. Assimilation encourages the commodification of LGBTQ+ identities for the proliferation of consumerism as a replacement for community and action. Assimilation preserves unequal access to education and healthcare between the classes, stifling opportunities for self-determination and a healthy life. Assimilation is not the pursuit of a better world, it is the dream of inclusion into an old, broken one.

Homonormativity is the term used to describe acceptable, ‘normal’ expressions of sexuality. This implies a progressive social context, where sexual minorities aren’t overtly persecuted, and I am isolating my commentary to the United States, where this normalizing process is apparent. Those being represented in media and thus benefiting from greater political and social gains are largely homonormative: monogamous gay and lesbian couples, who are typically White, middle-aged, and upper-middle class. These are the same people who are most likely to belong to or have access to what is described as the *donor class*: constituents with enough money to affect political races.

Assimilation is a luxury welcomed by those who can afford it. It is a goal of corporations and affluent couples, of those at the top of the social pyramid. This new homonormativity is an editing of LGBTQ+ culture to reflect the aspirations and trends of the most elite members of that

---

<sup>14</sup> The first hit in Google at the time of writing for ‘rules of marriage’ — 11 Rules On Marriage You Won’t Learn In School: <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/commitment/11-rules-on-marriage-you-wont-learn-in-school>



group. Those who promote assimilationism are very likely those who have been insulated by their privilege from the kinds of pain or violence that typically spur people to fight for liberation. How can you be liberated if you've always been free? Social liberation is the opportunity to dramatically restructure our society. It comes with the implicit understanding that our society maintains a violent capitalist empire with a deeply rooted caste system based on gendered rules, and that true social progress should not be measured by the richest of the poor.

While Equality (capital *e*) in law requires that full opportunities and benefits be provided to each and every person in this country, equality in the every-day is not a reality—LGBTQ+ people are still denied full cultural citizenship. The same goes to those who would now marry—they are not immune from bigotry, and the “legalization” of (some) LGBTQ+ people does not guarantee the protection of the most vulnerable members of the group. Ironically, the blind idealism surrounding patriotism and the nuclear family has us at a point where gays and lesbians can die and marry (and divorce) for their country, and at the same time be fired, denied housing or healthcare because of their sexuality or gender expression.

There has been much assimilationist rhetoric claiming LGBTQ+ people to be “Just Like You”—the dominant squares in power. Well, LGBTQ+ people are not just like you. We are denied our history, we are denied unbiased education and information about ourselves and our health. Assimilation has not meant homes and food for our queer kin on the streets; it has not provided political asylum from our queer brethren fleeing persecution and proxy wars half a world away. Only through liberation will these issues be addressed. As a community comprised of sexual minorities that spans race, class, gender and religion in a fluid, shifting mass of bodies and digital voices, LGBTQ+ people have the potential to bridge causes and build coalitions. As outsiders we have the innate ability to critique with queer eyes, but to also imagine wonderful queer futures for the benefit of all people, where there is justice for all—radically unlike our present.

The tidying up of the rainbow flag and its subsequent proliferation through niche marketing marks that it is no longer a subversive, alternative symbol—it has been absorbed into

the lexicon of the mainstream. Although it was never wholly a subversive tool—as flags are political legitimizers—it succeeded in providing visibility to a marginalized group whose very existence was often denied. That visibility made the whole ‘community’ a target for the elites in power, who in turn helped shape ideas regarding what good gays and lesbians did (and what they bought)—the new homonormativity ruled by rainbow bliss. Corporations have added layers of meaning on top of the rainbow flag, and once the advertising industry began using this symbol of resistance, its subversive capacity quickly diminished. Like most cultural artifacts that are inoffensive and assimilationist in character, the six-stripe flag was quickly absorbed into the neoliberal model, for reproduction, purchase, and dissemination.

A critical stance must be taken when approached with a rainbow flag. As an activist symbol, one has to ask: does the use of a six-stripe rainbow flag do anything to alter mainstream public perception regarding the rules of gender or the types of sex and relationships deemed ‘normal’? Does it confront stereotypes? How can an image of a rainbow—even an eight-striped one—ever be sufficiently radical to avoid being co-opted by marketers? I feel that at this point in time, the rainbow can act as an ambiguous veil: acting to signify something there, yet remain inoffensive and palatable—a weak LGBTQ+ politics. Active queer creation must continue to circumvent the multitude of mainstream messages being circulated about queers. Visibility, dignity of representation, and the maintenance of identity and lifestyles are considered requisites for a group’s full access to cultural citizenship.<sup>15</sup> Assimilation into the marketplace is not that.

---

<sup>15</sup> “...including the right to symbolic presence and visibility (versus marginalization); the right to dignifying representation (versus stigmatization); and the right to propagation of identity and maintenance of lifestyles (versus assimilation).” Diane Richardson and Surya Monro. *Sexuality, Equality & Diversity*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.) 66

## Another Polite but Ineffective Strategy for Making Radical Queerness Visible: Utopianism

Utopianism, like assimilation, is a recipe for failure. For example, one of the few manifestos or position statements on what a “queer design” practice might entail, *The Manifesto for Queer Universal Design*<sup>16</sup> synthesizes queer theory and universal design principles to propose an abstract utopian design methodology. However, this manifesto takes a decidedly limited and homogenous view of societies, and furthermore, it and all other pie-in-the-sky visions of the future fail precisely because they *are* utopian, and ignore the very real social, political, and economic constraints that constitute barriers to achieving real change.

Queerness can be described as the rejection of mainstream institutions and the dismantling of oppressive social hierarchies centered around patriarchal power and its strictly gendered roles. But the authors of *The Manifesto for Queer Universal Design* promote assimilation. In their translation of universal design’s *Principle One: Equitable Use*, the authors argue for (and promote) true and equal access to the social institution of military service; in *Principle Two: Flexibility in Use*, the authors argue for ambiguity of relationships, citing all manner of state-recognized unions, all while framing the context to only include couples—in blatant disregard of polyamorous relationships—revealing traces of the heteronormativity they seem to be decrying. *The Manifesto for Queer Universal Design* rationalizes the synthesis of queer theory and universal design principles to imagine a utopia in which everything is tolerated—but only within the constraints of the established system. Do the authors ever ask, should there be a military worth feeding bodies to? Should the pairing up of humans be advocated for economic fortification, or should we advocate for social systems where personal self-determination is possible?

At its very core, Universal Design is a utopian expression. With its rejection of specialized design methodologies for a one-body-fits-all social environment, the application of Universal Design to the lives of LGBTQ+ people ignores structural and systemic social issues.

---

<sup>16</sup> Monika Myers and Jason Crockett. “Manifesto for Queer Universal Design.”

This representation disregards social context and provides a destination but no path leading there; the manifesto utterly ignores the very real constraints standing in the way of liberation: including government, economy, and religion. Where all utopian design interventions fail is in their viability in the present. How do you get to utopia? How do you fight *in the present* against the neutering of culture?

## **The Way Forward: Subversion**

To subvert is to disrupt, to alter, to change the flow of something. Subversion is the best available way forward; at worst, it is ineffective, but at least it does not risk replicating injustice the way assimilation does, nor build (unsatisfactory) castles in the air. By challenging the present, subversion creates a path forward. The following are subversive techniques that have been successfully used by other marginalized groups before me, and which I have employed in making the works in my exhibition.

### **APPROPRIATION AND RE-APPROPRIATION**

Appropriation is the re-coding of cultural symbols in order to augment or disable the original meaning of the communication. Re-appropriation describes the re-coding of formerly oppressive meanings in order to re-claim rhetorical and political power. An example of re-appropriation includes the embrace by some of the term *queer* to describe their LGBT+ identity. By subverting a former derogatory slur (whose meaning can return to slur depending on context), there is a declaration of a radical left politics and a sort of linguistic activism.

In the mid-1980s, between the time of the creation of the Rainbow Pride flag and now, the AIDS crisis hit the United States.<sup>17</sup> In order to put pressure on the Reagan administration to address this public health crisis, political activist groups the Aids Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Gran Fury created series of protest graphics. The most iconic is their repurposing of the Nazi's pink triangle in their SILENCE = DEATH poster campaign. It's important to note that the AIDS era activists did not shy away from the Nazi triangle in the same way that Gilbert Baker did. Rather than fleeing from the negative connotations associated with the pink triangle used to mark homosexual men in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, ACT UP activist stole the triangle back. By inversion, the triangle was a reclamation: subverting its original

---

<sup>17</sup> A rare lung infection would be reported in 1981. It wouldn't be until 1985 and thousands of deaths that President Reagan would mention AIDS publicly. <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>

meaning in order to empower a stigmatized and discriminated against minority. Simultaneously, the use of the pink triangle also throws blame on the US government, equating their passive strategy of silence in the face of the AIDS crisis to the active extermination and imprisonment of queers in the Nazi death camps.



Illustration 3: (Left) ACT UP's iconic re-appropriation of the the Nazi's pink triangle to call attention to the AIDS crisis<sup>18</sup> (Right) the pink triangle designating homosexual men in concentration camps<sup>19</sup>

I became interested in sex toy symbolism when I first recognized the opportunity to appropriate the historic Texas *Come and Take It* flag for my own devious purposes. If misogyny is all about having a phallus, it's easy to challenge by confrontation with a sex toy. What is it

---

<sup>18</sup> [actupny.org](http://actupny.org)

<sup>19</sup> <http://plumsauceproductions.com/tag/pink-triangle/>

about sex toys that is subversive? Put simply, they're for pleasure. Dildos remove the need for an insertive penis to provide pleasure, and because dildos don't produce semen, they thoroughly sever carnal pleasure from procreation (at least for heterosexuals). Liberal activists have taken to utilizing dildos to combat right-wing, conservative extremism, intentionally violating obscenity laws.<sup>20</sup>

In each of these cases, the dildo was weaponized in response to expressions of toxic masculinity; by appropriating a phallus they are able to mock and emasculate their foes. Heterofascists such as Men's Rights activists and evangelicals take their manhood very seriously, and a tried and true strategy to get them riled up is to attack it.

### **Culture Jamming**

Culture jamming is the contemporary grandchild of the Situationist movement and their strategy of *détournement*, or spectacle, as political theater. Utilizing appropriation techniques, these activist-media makers speak the same visual language as those they are criticizing: corporations and advertisers pushing a consumer-driven cultural agenda.<sup>21</sup> Most famously, Adbusters has used parodies of well-known advertising campaigns and brands to make pointed social critiques. By turning powerful imagery and logos on their heads, Adbusters seeks to deflate them and drain them of meaning in much the same way that corporations have drained the rainbow flag of meaning: by changing their significance.

### **ALTERNATIVE AESTHETICS (AKA "BAD DESIGN")**

A major factor in the way in which designed objects are designed is how they will eventually be produced. With mass production chains in a globalized economy, this translates to a streamlining and unification of color palettes, of forms, of creation itself. Normative effects on visual language are also dictated by the way media are formatted, distributed, and monetized.

---

<sup>20</sup> Cocks Not Glocks is an activist group at UT Austin that is protesting the passing of open gun carry laws on campus. They are "fighting absurdity with absurdity." <http://cocksnotglocks.org/>

<sup>21</sup> Ava Wettergren. Like Moths to a Flame—Culture Jamming and the Global Spectacle

The cleanest, most polished, and “beautiful” aesthetics are those endorsed by the ruling manufacturing and media classes. Thus one obvious way to subvert or disrupt normativity is to develop an alternative set of aesthetics that challenges these expectations.

I begin with ideas surrounding cultural hegemony, in which the ruling classes in society control the production, distribution, and content of media within that society, therefore controlling it totally.<sup>22</sup> The aesthetics of this bourgeois media has been historically confronted and rejected by radical media makers who look to fundamentally change the way a text interacts with the audience, to expose and critique hidden structures of power.

Radical queers have felt the sexuality and magic leave with the solidifying of a mainstream gay identity. As a response to the de-politicizing of queer symbols and the censorship of queer bodies, alternative queer aesthetes like John Waters, Kenneth Anger, Mykki Blanco and boychild have used DIY, punk, glitch, and tribalist graphics and images that deviate from the streamlined, established images of the mainstream to articulate an aesthetics of resistance. These non-mainstream aesthetics are aligned directly against modern production and fabrication methods—which call for standardization and formatting, since designer and producer are often coordinating impersonally.

## **Camp**

As a form of critique and commentary of the normative and mainstream, the camp performative strategy is firmly rooted in queer expression, and encompasses the rhetorical devices of irony, aestheticism, and humor.<sup>23</sup> Expressions of camp stem from a deeper sensitivity of the nuance of culture, most likely gained by those who have been disenfranchised or marginalized in the larger society, and includes parody of that culture as a form of critique.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Fraser builds elegantly on Habermas’ public/private sphere in *Rethinking the Public Sphere*

<sup>23</sup> Jack Babuscio. *Camp and the Gay Sensibility*.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Booth. *Campe-Toi! On the Origins and Definitions of Camp*





Illustration 4: Video still of John Waters film *Female Trouble*<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/84/ba/84/84ba847b2a066ce2f5896df4fdf821ff.jpg>

## Exhibition: C0ME + TAKE IT



Illustration 5: C0ME + TAKE IT installation<sup>26</sup>

Normative design aesthetic is suffocating in that everything must be streamlined for faster and faster production times or technological constraints—Pantone colors assigned, graphics cleanly vectored for the internet, symmetrical 3d models for fabrication. In order to critique the symbols and rhetoric I was finding in regards to LGBTQ+ culture and community, I used appropriation to re-code the often derogatory or ‘objective’ normative artifacts.

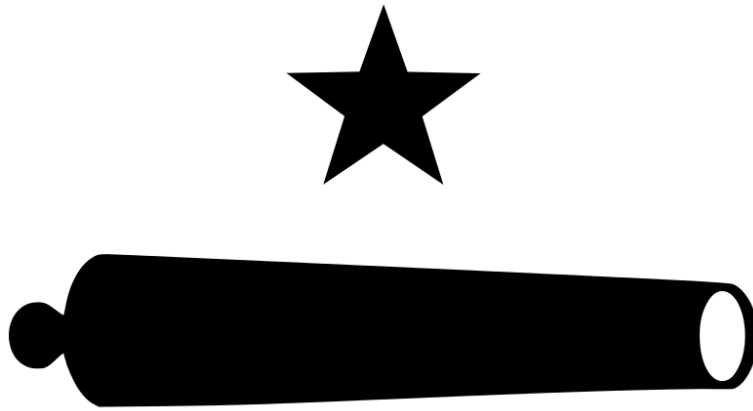
I am using traditional queer tools of subversion—satire, camp, and mockery—in the objects that I present as consumable, yet un-consumable in the gallery display space. I rely on appropriation and iterative experimentation to modify the original symbols or ideas.

---

<sup>26</sup> UT Visual Arts Center, Sandy Carson

## EXHIBITION ARTIFACTS

### COME + TAKE IT Flag



# COME AND TAKE IT

Illustration 6: Modern vector Come and Take It graphic<sup>27</sup>

As a native Texan I always have seemed to know the Come and Take It cannon, filed away in the collective memory banks with the other symbols, along with bluebonnets, yellow roses, and the Alamo. The original *Come and Take It* was used as a symbol of rebellion by Texian settlers at the Battle of Gonzales, historically considered the flashpoint in the Texas Revolution. Today it is used as a symbol of Texan pride, propped up by hyper-masculinity and patriotism—bordering on jingoism—much like the greater US identity.

---

<sup>27</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Come\\_and\\_take\\_it#/media/File:Texas\\_Flag\\_Come\\_and\\_Take\\_It.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Come_and_take_it#/media/File:Texas_Flag_Come_and_Take_It.svg)



Illustration 7: Come and Take It appropriated by feminist and pro-gun activists<sup>28</sup>

Appropriated for my own devious purposes, my COME + TAKE IT flag is a 7'x4' flag hanging above my exhibition space like a herald. On a small shelf on the wall below, I filled a rainbow-emblazoned coffee mug with miniature COME + TAKE IT flags at 7"x4". Interested in graphics and semiotics, I was drawn to subvert the iconic cannon with a butt plug. Similarly to the pro-choice appropriation and against the pro-gun interpretation seen in Illustration 7, I created my version of the flag to ultimately mock the rugged cowboy masculinity that is pervasive in the Texan ideological narrative.

While the use of the dildo is great for expressing feminine liberation and evoking castration anxiety, it remains steadfastly heteronormative when weaponized against masculine oppressors. The penis shape goes in the vaginal opening. Going a step further subversively, I utilize butt toys and evoke anal sexual pleasure to completely remove any connotation of traditional, procreative sex. This positions my work in opposition to the anti-pleasure, anti-non-procreative sexual stances of the conservative, evangelical right.

I was also intrigued by abstracted, non-penis shaped sex toys because they embody twentieth-century modern design ideals: namely that form follows function, that lack of

<sup>28</sup> [http://leap-of-fate.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/take\\_it\\_uterus\\_6\\_web.jpg](http://leap-of-fate.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/take_it_uterus_6_web.jpg);  
[http://www.weaponstickers.com/images/full/5.5x3.5\\_cati\\_AR15\\_b.png](http://www.weaponstickers.com/images/full/5.5x3.5_cati_AR15_b.png)

ornament is a virtue, and that abstraction is preferable to realistic representation. That swoop, that bevel: it's abstract utility! The Utilitarian Design of Pleasure. I subvert the blank canvas of economical design for my own purposes: shock and awe, maybe some laughs.

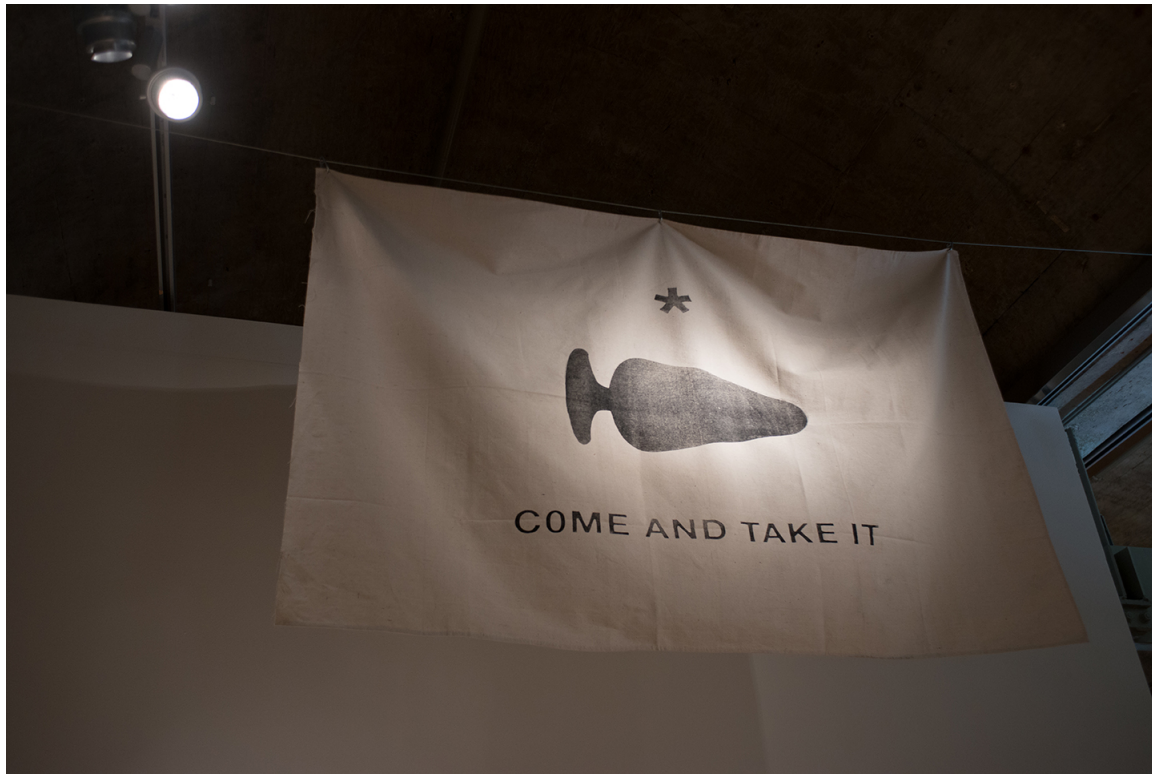


Illustration 8: COME + TAKE IT flag<sup>29</sup>

In my quest to test the limits of ambiguity in design, I neglected to clearly mark which of my pieces were indeed handle-able or takeaway objects. An interesting thing happened: since my part of the overall thesis exhibition was situated on the second floor—the Design floor where the audience was encouraged to handle the prototypes on display—it was assumed that the same was true for my objects. A ‘designed’ object + in multiples + at exhibition = take-away. By the end of opening night, all the miniature COME + TAKE IT flags were gobbled up, leaving an empty, used-up coffee mug.

---

<sup>29</sup> UT Visual Arts Center, Sandy Carson



Illustration 9: The author carrying a COME + TAKE IT prototype at Queerbomb! 2015 in Austin, Texas

I also subverted the principles of “good” typography in the flag. Helvetica has been considered the pinnacle of objective, economical typography. I find its predictability and ubiquity in our visual environment to be boring, and very safe. So I decided to subtly corrupt Helvetica in my typographical experiments. Only the ohs would be altered, replaced by zeros. The result is to provide just a twitch of recognition that something is amiss, similar to the black butt plug slyly taking the cannon’s place. As an added layer of messaging, I replaced the original flag’s five-pointed star with an asterisk, simultaneously signaling an ‘amendment’ as well as an abstracted anus shape.



## Functional Wedding Ring



Illustration 10: Rubber Functional Wedding Ring<sup>30</sup>

When I was younger, one of the most beautiful things about being in non-normative intimate relationships was the privilege of making up your own rules. I would listen to straight guy friends complain about being broke from paying for so many dates and I would giggle, because I'd just trade off with mine. Then the giant push toward marriage equality, and my Mom is asking when I'm getting married and giving her grandkids.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, mainstream gay rights organization focused on two main goals—the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell and Marriage Equality—allowing gays and lesbians into the coveted American institutions of Military and Marriage. I entered graduate school in the midst of the Marriage Equality movement—a baffling and purely symbolic political action made in my behalf (or so they said). Why would marriage be important to a millennial who took out student loans during the banking crisis, and unable to find steady work thereafter? I

---

<sup>30</sup> UT Visual Arts Center, Sandy Carson

guess with the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell, there is always a military outpost somewhere that I can inhabit; the path toward the conservative American Dream ideal is a little clearer. The functional wedding ring is a recognition of how marriage become a rallying, all-consuming locus for mainstream gay activist organizations. I personally believe (and know that I'm not alone) that marriage is full of baggage: normative expectations involving who does what, when and how. There's a reason divorce rates are what they are.

The butt plug wedding ring is a collision between faceted diamond and butt plug shapes, perched on a relatively fat ring. They are arranged on a three-tiered circular display shelf, edged in glitter and evoking a traditional wedding cake and commercial store fixtures. The lowest, widest tier contains the prototypes and the errors - the middle tier contains the aesthetic yet non-functional rings, and the top tier contains the iconic black rubber material. The diamond plugs are an impressive size (about 6.5" in diameter), because doesn't everyone want bigger diamonds?

The functional wedding rings are available to all consumers, along 3 tiered levels of accessibility. At the top is the most functional symbolic object, made of black polyurethane rubber; the color and material referencing BDSM<sup>31</sup> + athletic kink. The intermediate level is composed of aesthetically appealing yet physically unusable (or toxic, rather) colored ply-paper and paper-pulp resin.

---

<sup>31</sup> Bondage and Discipline, Domination and submission, Sadism and Masochism





Illustration 11:  
Functional  
Wedding Ring  
display<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> UT Visual Arts Center, Sandy Carson

The butt plug wedding ring is subversive not only in its form, but also in its means of production and distribution. As a maker, open source software is definitely a privilege. It is also a challenge to the personal ego (and bank account) to author work and then offer it for free. Yet, if one can think beyond one's own ego, the benefits of sharing the fruits of one's labor to others creates an even greater ripple than claiming IP in the name of capitalism. Open source is the legal, *moral* way to reshape culture, versus appropriation that involves unauthorized theft and perversion. Where my own 3d modeling skills fumbled, I was able to utilize the free-share website Thingiverse, where I sourced a faceted diamond and butt plug 3d models. Using Rhinoceros 3d and Geomagic Studio, I melded my own parts and augmented it further to result in my Functional Wedding Ring.

### ***Production***

In terms of the actual fabrication of the various wedding rings, it was creation through failure and iteration. In an academic environment, I was excited to explore every possible way of making that I could take advantage of, and naturally that came with plenty of failure.

In an effort to reference gift shop, tchotchke aesthetics, I sought out a material I had been introduced to before: SpectraPly. SpectraPly is created by a laminating colored sheets of wood into a patterned block of plywood. Due to the ridiculously high pricing of SpectraPly, I decided to try my hand at creating my own using 100lb colored cardstock. Using polyvinyl acetate to bind the sheets together, I layered hundreds of sheets together until I created a rainbow-colored block of material ready for the 4-axis milling machine.

I was fascinated by the multi-colored, paper-pulp detritus that resulted from the milling of the faux-SpectraPly block. Looking to push the material further, I decided to mix it with epoxy resin—a boat hull sealer and popular sculpture material—in order to capture the texture and color. I'm not completely sure what happened, but there must have been a chemical or thermal reaction between the epoxy resin and the polyvinyl acetate I used as an adhesive. Rather than casting a solid confetti resin-object ready for milling, the material was pocked and was run

through with bubbles, like Swiss cheese or volcanic rock. The bubbly errors weren't revealed until half-way through the milling process (hours), when it was also revealed that the material was too brittle to withstand the machining process and exploded; it was a devastating and then thrilling revelation.

My attempts at mold-making were thwarted by my unwillingness to make my 3d model symmetrical down the vertical axis, a common design constraint that I wished to subvert. It was my original plan to create a body-safe silicone Wedding Ring, but mold-making and -casting failures ensued, so I was forced to use brush-on polyurethane rubber applied to a 3d printed skeleton. I found this to be a useful metaphor—marriage is toxic in the end, after all.

### **Ex-Straight Conversion Therapy**



Illustration 12: Detail of signage typography<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> UT Visual Arts Center, Sandy Carson

I created this piece as a snarky response to the failed ex-gay conversion therapy scams that promised to help ‘pray the gay away’ While the top psychiatric and psychological associations have agreed that sexual conversion therapy is not a real thing, I suggest that maybe the answer lies somewhere near the rear end.



Illustration 13: Ex-Straight Conversion Therapy and Magic Eye Rainbow<sup>34</sup>

My therapy regimen consists primarily of a ~7' long string of anal beads. Each bead is milled from maple approximately 1.5" in diameter, with a letter milled into the surface of each,

---

<sup>34</sup> UT Visual Arts Center, Sandy Carson



spelling out E-X-S-T-R-A-I-G-H-T-T-H-E-R-A-P-Y. Bound together with leather cording and reinforced with rubber grommets, the beads are held in an outstretched (found-object) mannequin arm, draping to the floor and curling up to rest on the pedestal. The arm is anchored to an all-white piece of signage reminiscent of an A-frame sign, surrealistically reaching out of a white portal to present the metaphysical therapy regimen. On the reverse side, the phrase “FINALLY SEXUAL CONVERSION THERAPY THAT REALLY WORKS!!” is presented using routing, laser etching and cutting to create typography that actively plays with real and illusory dimensions.

The aesthetics used in this piece combine high and low production design techniques. Nice maple wood was milled on a 4-axis router, finished with lacquer, and strung with leather cording and rubber grommets. The signage board was CNC-routed, laser-cut, and laser-etched with a combination of assembled wood and acrylic sheets. Yet found mannequin parts and shelving hardware were used to cobble together a strange commercial display; I wanted to use hardware and fixtures that were familiar to the audience in a commercial or utilitarian setting, yet *twist* the presentation into strangeness, disrupting audience expectations of form.

Here, too, I used my typographic technique of perverting the forms of modern type (in this case Helvetica and Futura) by replacing the ohs with zeros. I like the ambiguous communication of that subtle replacement—most people would overlook such a minute typographic contrast. Yet the replacement of letters with numbers has another useful connotation: the internet. Associations with tech project these typographic styles into the future.

### **Rainbowashing Corner**

The Rainbowashing video is a looping, droning video placed awkwardly in the corner; the rainbow-applied corporate logos of modern-day marketing campaigns flashing spastically by. Within their original context, they may have seemed innocuous; layered on top of one another, played next to each other, their intent becomes suspect. While seeming innocuous to some, I see this as brutal proof that the rainbow’s political power has waned.

I positioned the cube monitor to play the Rainbowwashing video parallel to the wall in order to cast its equality-colored hues across the main wall of my exhibit, and across all visitors. I chose a cube tube TV rather than a flat-screen monitor or projection because I wanted to evoke the media forms of the past, implying this commodification of identity has been happening for a long time.



Illustration 14: Rainbowwashing corner<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> UT Visual Arts Center, Sandy Carson

## **Magic Eye Rainbow**

This is a 12'x24" "magic eye" stereogram image created with a rainbow graphic and a depth map (monochrome image designating depth information) of a butt plug using the software Sirds, which is also the anagram for single image random dot stereogram.<sup>36</sup> I was drawn to stereograms because they were literal optical illusions, versus the contextual/semantic/semiotic illusions that I was looking at in advertising and marketing. "Magic eyes," as marketed towards children, are a novelty. Sometimes they work for people, but some people can never see them. Once you've seen one magic eye, you can assume a pretty similar experience every time. They are cheap, but magical. And they are perfect for hiding butt plugs in.

For the Sirds program to work, you must have a viable textured or patterned image paired with an underlying depth map—a monochrome image designating depth information through grayscale. As is, the rainbow flag is unsuited for stereogram-making: the discrete horizontal bars aren't conducive to hiding forms that bridge the color fields. So I decided to use a glitch technique of re-feeding output back in as input. The entire length is produced iteratively—a combination of 10 individual images—where each stereogram image is saved and fed back into the program. The resulting output images were increasingly decayed and fragmented rainbows, creating a more successful magic eye.

---

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.katsurashareware.com/pgs/sirds.html>

## Queer Capsule Surprise



Illustration 15: Picked through remains of the capsule surprise—some stickers have been removed<sup>37</sup>

In an effort to deviate from the standard capitalist market strategies that usually revolve around the designing and making of something, I decided to offer my most iconic designs to the public for free. I filled an acrylic cube with the paper detritus that was the result of the laminated rainbow butt plug, and nestled gumball machine capsules with circular COME + TAKE IT stickers inside. The detritus evoked window displays and Easter baskets, yet the pulp was grimy. The capsule tops haphazardly affixed with glitter, and under each top there is a URL where the public can download digital versions of the COME + TAKE IT vector graphic and FUNCTIONAL WEDDING RING 3d model.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> UT Visual Arts Center, Sandy Carson

<sup>38</sup> [jessecline.com/come-n-take-it](http://jessecline.com/come-n-take-it)



## So, What?

There are three reactions to my exhibition that perfectly illuminate what I was trying to do. An elderly man and woman, aghast at the pieces—“How could they possibly let this in here??”. A young effeminate man rushing up to me and excitedly declaring it to be the best thing *ever*. And lastly, a young mother giving her 4-year old son a Queer Capsule Surprise.

These provocative, subversive, discursive objects may not fall under the traditional umbrella of communication or industrial design, but it is precisely for this reason that this type of work is important. At this moment, activist groups are pushing hard for “religious freedom” legislation, which protects religious businesses from discriminating against LGBTQ+ people. Free Market ideology and religious extremism are running amok—brother-brainwashings of Buy and Believe. This work is important because the straight-laced, boring and privileged *normals* triumph at every turn, so their power and influence should be questioned and undermined at every turn. While our ancestors fought hard for gains in civil and women’s rights, there has been a continuous barrage from the conservative white right to erode voting rights and access to women’s health. The accomplishments of the past are under constant threat by those who long for the good ol’ days of men in power, women at home cooking dinner, and queers in the closet where they belong. I also created these pieces to serve as entrance points for criticism—are the things our constituents fought for really the things that we want? For too long the American political and media process has been a spectacle. But what better way to comment on a spectacle than to create one?

This design project was a test. It was a test in personal identity, in agency in expressing that identity, in allowing for ambiguity in design that is reflected in every human. There was no solid, tangible, testable goal for this work to achieve. Yet those three audience reactions validate the intentions of this work: it challenges the past, it resonates with the present, and it suggests possibilities for the future—and proposes some modest first steps for getting there.

## References

- “About,” Cocks Not Glocks. 2015. [cocksnotglocks.org/menu](http://cocksnotglocks.org/menu).
- Adams, Blumenfeld, Castañeda, Hackman, Peters. 2010. *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge.
- Antonelli, Paola. 2015. “MOMA Acquires the Rainbow Flag” *Inside/Out*. Museum of Modern Art. [http://www.moma.org/explore/inside\\_out/2015/06/17/moma-acquires-the-rainbow-flag/](http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2015/06/17/moma-acquires-the-rainbow-flag/).
- Babuscio, Jack. 1993. “Camp and the Gay Sensibility”. *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. Boston: U. of Massachusetts Press.
- Booth, Mark. 1999. “Campe-Toi! On the Origins and Definitions of Camp”. *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Fabio Cleto. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Campbell-Dollaghan, Kelsey. 2015. “How the Rainbow Pride Flag Lost Its Prink and Turquoise Stripes.” *Gizmodo*. <http://gizmodo.com/how-the-rainbow-pride-flag-lost-its-pink-and-turquoise-1714201920>.
- Conrad, Ryan 2014. *Against Equality: Queer Revolution Not Mere Inclusion*. Oakland: AK Press.
- Cvetkovich, Anne. 2002. “In the Archives of Lesbian Feelings: Documentary and Popular Culture.” *Camera Obscura*: 1-147.
- Dery, Mark. 2015. “Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of Signs.” [markdery.com](http://markdery.com).
- Duggan, Lisa. 2003. *The Twilight of Equality?* Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Evidence Of The Corporatization Of Pride Parade, In One Pie Chart. 2015. [http://chicagoist.com/2015/07/06/evidence\\_of\\_the\\_corporatization\\_of.php](http://chicagoist.com/2015/07/06/evidence_of_the_corporatization_of.php)
- Fraser, Nancy. 1993. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Lasn, Kalle. 2002. “The People vs The Corporate Cool Machine.” *Looking Closer 4*. Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller. New York: Allworth Press. 22-25.
- Levrant de Bretteville, Sheila. 1999. “Some Aspects of Design From the Perspective of a Woman Designer.” *Looking Closer 3*. Michael Bierut, Jessica Helfand, Steven Heller, Rick Poyner. New York: Allworth Press. 238-245.
- Mogul et al. 2011. *Queer (In)Justice: The Criminalization of LGBT People in the United States*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Myers, Monika. and Crockett, Jason. 2012. “Manifesto for Queer Universal Design.” *Finland Queer Studies Association Journal*.
- Pakulski, Jan. 1997. “Cultural Citizenship.” *Citizenship Studies*, 73-86.

- Peñaloza, Lisa. 1996. "We're Here, We're Queer, and We're Going Shopping! A Critical Perspective on the Accommodation of Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Marketplace." *Gays, Lesbians, and Consumer Behavior*. Wardlow, Daniel L. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Rainey, Dennis. 2013. 11 Rules On Marriage You Won't Learn In School: <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/commitment/11-rules-on-marriage-you-wont-learn-in-school>
- Richardson, Diane and Monro, Surya. 2012. *Sexuality, Equality & Diversity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rimmerman, Craig A. 2008. *The Lesbian and Gay Movements: Assimilation or Liberation?* Boulder: Westview Press.
- Swanson, Anna. 2015. "How the Rainbow Became the Symbol of Gay Pride" *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/06/29/how-the-rainbow-became-the-symbol-of-gay-pride/>.
- Sycamore, Matilda Bernstein. "An L.G.B.T. Movement Should Be More Radical". *The New York Times*. June 25 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/10/15/are-trans-rights-and-gay-rights-still-allies/an-lgbt-movement-should-be-more-radical>.
- Walters, Suzanna Danuta. 2003. *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wettergren, Ava. 2003. "Like Moths to a Flame—Culture Jamming and the Global Spectacle" *Representing Resistance: Media, Civil Disobedience, and the Global Justice Movement*. Andy Opel, Donnalyn Pompper. Santa Barbara: Praeger Publishing.
- Yavuz, Seval Dülgeroglu. 2006. "Mediating Messages: Cultural Reproduction through Advertising". Bennett, Audrey. *Design Studies: Theory and Research in Graphic Design*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. (pp 273-290)
- Zorthian, Julia. 2015. "How the Rainbow Flag Became an Icon of LGBT Rights" *Time*. <http://time.com/3932733/rainbow-flag-lgbt-pride-same-sex-marriage/>.